24:Meulen and Wissmann T-3 (1931)1932 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

After descending the slope on which the town lies, we enter a wonderfully ploughed area of loam soil. The brown hills of loam rise up, completely bare, out of the deep green palm-groves and the fields of *dhura*. An extensive system of irrigation canals with their side-channels provides for the distribution of the *sēl* water over all the cultivated land lying between the hill-ridges. The further we go beyond Hadjarēn the larger grows the number of defence and watch towers on the hill-tops beside the groves. The number of date-palms decreases, the fields are, at first, green, but, at last, only the loam dykes indicate that, given sufficient water and adequate safety, one can sow here as elsewhere. A stretch of half an hour's going forms the neutral zone between the Qeᶜēṭī and the Kathīrī territories. From now on, in view of the risk of being held up, the caravan must keep together. The bed of the wādī remains wide, yet becomes wild and devoid of vegetation. Here and there the loess is covered by sand and stones. There must have been a large town here in ancient times, for the way to el-Meshhed runs between ruin mounds. The sun is setting and we are to reach el-Meshhed before darkness falls. The donkeys are sent back to fetch the tired party who have climbed Djebel Hadjarēn.

241
361

5. EL-MESHHED, A CENTRE OF RUINS.

El-Meshhed is an extinct small town situated in the midst of the plantless, desert wādī. The meaning of the name el-Meshhed is "the place where a martyr died". It is important for a yearly fair and as a place of pilgrimage. During the days in the month of Muḥarram, fixed for that purpose, the place must be full of buyers and sellers lodging in the houses and temporary shacks; now most of the houses are empty.

361
103
438

The Governor of el-Meshhed is not in town, he prefers residence in the larger, more prosperous Ḥurēḍa, where he has also a house, a family, and groves of date-palms. His sons are

662

24: Meulen and Wissmann T-3 (1931)1932 ? 2 Hadhramaut MM2

fine young men, who represent their father in the duties of host most admirably. The el-ʿAṭṭās family has a big well-kept guest-house for relations passing through el-Meshhed. The roof-storey has been recently whitewashed, the mud staircases and passages, the bathroom, lavatories and everything are clean. It is a luxury for us to be able to have a bath and to put up our camp-beds on the clean, white roof-terrace, high up above the dirty smells, which pervade every Arab town. What a difference from the stable-roof at Ṣīf!

On Tuesday, May 19th, we begin a detailed examination of the inscriptions at el-Meshhed and of the ruins of Ghēbūn, which are near by, to the south and south-west. We were shown stones with Sabaean inscriptions, built into houses, saints' graves, mosques, *siqāyas* and into the large, very deep village well. The material is not favourable; the limestone which is used is taken from the neighbouring mountains and is brittle, and, consequently, there remain only fragments of most of the inscriptions. A longer and more minute research than we could undertake would most certainly bring a great deal more to light. Ten minutes' walk out of el-Meshhed to the south-west lies the group of ruins of Ghēbūn. They are ascribed by the inhabitants to the fabulous people of the ʿĀdites and are probably on the site of a Ḥimyaritic city. One sees hillocks as much as thirty feet in height, and on their tops the remains of walls built up of great, hewn blocks of stone, which have been bound with a sort of cement. On one of the first hills we see the remains of four stone foundations with square impressions, probably the bases of pillars. Towards the slopes we find many fragments of stone with characters inscribed on them. On the next hillock there is an old well, thirty feet in diameter and quite sixty feet deep. The upper part of its wall consists of a layer of piled-up stone, while the lower part is of mud. The well is partly filled with rubbish and was probably much deeper originally than it is now. The subsoil water-level here is quite 180 feet below the surface of the earth. Many fragments of simple pottery lie